

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INTERAGENCY
COMMITTEE ON CIGARETTE AND LITTLE CIGAR FIRE SAFETY
December, 1987

SUMMARY

The Interagency Committee on Cigarette and Little Cigar Fire Safety, having reviewed the findings of its Technical Study Group, is making four recommendations that, taken together, should determine the commercial feasibility, consumer acceptance and health implications of producing cigarettes less likely to ignite mattresses and upholstered furniture. Those recommendations call for:

- * development and testing of potentially feasible prototype cigarettes with reduced ignition propensity for consumer acceptability and smoke toxicity.
- * development of a standardized ignition propensity test method by which the effectiveness of future "less fire-prone" cigarettes can be measured.
- * assignment of this work to the National Bureau of Standards (NBS) which will either undertake, contract for, or validate the tasks in question.
- * creation of a scientific, nine-member Advisory Committee to guide this research, report on its findings and make recommendations to Congress on those findings.

To encourage prompt completion of this work, the Interagency Committee also recommends that the necessary research be completed and follow-up recommendations filed within two years of the date funds are appropriated for the project. Should the ultimate result be the commercial marketing of less fire-prone cigarettes, many lives could be saved, burn injuries prevented and property damage significantly reduced in the United States each year.

2046737731

BACKGROUND

In 1984, Congress adopted the Cigarette Safety Act to determine the technical and commercial feasibility of developing cigarettes and little cigars that would be less likely to ignite upholstered furniture and mattresses. To oversee the research necessary to make these determinations, an Interagency Committee (IAC) on Cigarette and Little Cigar Fire Safety was established, consisting of the Chairman of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, the U.S. Fire Administrator and the Assistant Secretary of Health of the Department of Health and Human Services. Also, a Technical Study Group (TSG) was created to direct the research and to report to the IAC on its findings. Within 60 days of submission of that report, the IAC was to provide Congress with any recommendations it deemed appropriate.

On September 21, 1987, the TSG culminated its work on these feasibility studies by unanimously adopting a report which the IAC then forwarded to the Congress on October 29, 1987. That report concluded that "...it is technically feasible and may be commercially feasible to develop cigarettes that will have a significantly reduced propensity to ignite upholstered furniture or mattresses." This conclusion was based on eight specific findings and was followed by recommendations for additional research and the development of a standardized cigarette ignition propensity test method.

FINDINGS

The IAC, having reviewed the work of the TSG, concludes that this report makes a significant contribution to the potential development of a less fire-prone cigarette. In particular, the TSG was able to identify four cigarette characteristics which can reduce ignition propensity, those being: (1) smaller cigarette circumference, (2) lower density tobacco, (3) less porous paper and (4) reduction of the citrate addition to the paper. Likewise, the TSG determined that the per puff tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide yields associated with some experimental (non-commercial) cigarettes containing such characteristic(s) were similar to those of the best

2046737732

selling commercial cigarettes.¹ In addition, the TSG provided useful insights into various benefits and costs that might be associated with the incorporation of these features into commercially marketed cigarettes.

There are, however, a number of questions left unanswered by the TSG's final report. As the text makes clear, the TSG did not test any experimental or patented cigarettes manifesting those characteristics, for consumer acceptance. Thus, it was not possible to reliably estimate the number of less fire-prone cigarettes that might be smoked which, in turn, could have an impact on both the incidence of cigarette-initiated fires and smoking-related disease. Nor, due to time constraints, was an attempt made to develop prototype cigarettes that are likely to reduce ignition propensity and achieve such acceptance. As a consequence, the TSG was not able to determine whether the smoke chemistry of such prototypes would differ in significant ways from that of cigarettes currently on the market, a consideration of paramount importance since even a small increase in the likelihood of cancer, heart attacks or lung disease would more than offset the reduction in deaths and injuries projected to result from a decrease in cigarette ignited fires. Thus, the commercial feasibility and health implications of developing a less fire-prone cigarette are undetermined and will remain that way until such time as potentially marketable varieties are developed, test marketed and analyzed for toxicity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With that in mind, the Interagency Committee recommends that legislation be adopted to facilitate the development and testing of a less fire-prone cigarette. Specifically, the IAC suggests that it and the TSG be replaced by a new, nine member Advisory Committee which, after completion of the necessary technical work, would submit a final report to the Congress, complete with findings and recommendations, on the commercial feasibility and health implications

¹ "Toward a Less Fire-Prone Cigarette," Final Report of the Technical Study Group on Cigarette and Little Cigar Fire Safety, October, 1987, p. 15.

² Ibid., p. 11.

of producing such a cigarette. This Advisory Committee would provide guidance to and receive administrative support from the National Bureau of Standards (NBS) which, in turn, would undertake, contract for, or validate prototype development, consumer acceptance testing (which the IAC believes is more properly the role of industry), smoke chemistry analysis (to determine potential short and long term health effects) and the creation of a standardized ignition propensity performance test method. Should prototype testing support development and eventual marketing of cigarettes with reduced ignition propensity, the existence of such a test method would provide a prompt, dependable way of determining whether cigarettes of that description lived up to expectations.

Relying on its experience over the past three years, the IAC estimates that the cost, to the federal government, of these projects would be approximately:

(1) Consumer acceptance testing/ validation	-- \$50,000
(2) Smoke chemistry analysis (from existing sources, if appropriate)	-- 50,000
(3) Development of a standardized ignition propensity test method	-- 300,000
(4) Advisory Committee travel expenses (based on a nine member Committee holding four meetings per year for two years)	-- 100,000
<hr/>	
Total for two years	\$500,000

As for the actual production of prototype cigarettes, the IAC recommends that consideration be given to asking the industry to donate, to the Advisory Committee (AC), the prototype cigarettes needed for testing. Not only was a similar arrangement of considerable benefit to the TSG during the recently completed cigarette ignition propensity work but, as a practical matter, obtaining prototypes from other sources could be more difficult and time consuming.

204673734

Based on these estimates, the IAC recommends that the new AC be given two years to complete its work from the time funds are appropriated for that purpose. During that time, the AC should provide periodic progress reports to Congress. In addition, the IAC recommends that a total of \$500,000 be appropriated to the NBS in support of this effort. Of this sum, the IAC suggests that \$100,000 should be specifically earmarked for travel and expenses associated with Advisory Committee meetings.

With respect to the specific makeup of this Advisory Committee, the IAC observes that considerable scientific expertise will be required for it to successfully carry out its responsibilities. Therefore, the IAC suggests that this entity be comprised of individuals with extensive technical background(s) in public health, cigarette production, smoke toxicity testing, test method development and/or market survey techniques. Also, the IAC recommends that the meetings of this Advisory Committee be open to the public, except when trade secret or proprietary information is being discussed, and that the public be notified in advance of the dates of these meetings.

CONCLUSION

In making these recommendations, the Interagency Committee is acutely aware of what is at stake. If additional research leads to the successful development of a cigarette less likely to start furniture fires, up to an estimated 1,500 deaths, 7,000 injuries and nearly \$500 million in property losses could be prevented in the United States each year. However, the IAC has no desire to subject the American taxpayer to the burden of financing an interminable series of studies that never resolve the basic issue of feasibility. Indeed, extended delay in the marketing of a less fire-prone cigarette, should such a product be feasible, would deprive the American public of much of the benefit that could otherwise result from its development. Thus, the IAC believes the issues of feasibility, consumer acceptance and health implications need to be resolved one way or the other as expeditiously as good science will allow. And it firmly believes these recommendations will result in just such a resolution.

³ Ibid p. 3.

CREDITS

The Interagency Committee wishes to thank the members of the Technical Study Group (TSG), the appropriate staff of the National Bureau of Standards and the individual contractors who conducted and analyzed the technical work upon which these recommendations are based. As noted in its "Findings," the TSG significantly advanced the state of knowledge in the area of cigarette ignition propensity and deserves particular credit for having done so.

2046737736